1953

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"OH, DRY THE STARTING TEAR"

There appears to be a strange dearth of mention of insurance in English-language literature. One of the Nation's largest businesses and familiar in detail to nearly everyone, insurance nevertheless seems to be ignored by our authors and by creators in all other art forms as well.

There are, of course, a few detective stories which treat of insurance-murder rackets, but they hardly rank as literature, with the possible exception of Cain's *Double Indemnity*. Occasionally, too, a minor character in a novel is identified as an insurance man. But the business itself has not been dealt with in a novel, a play, a moving picture—nor even in a short story of any stature.

Just about every other field of endeavor—ancient, medieval or modern—has been glamorized by somebody, but insurance and the insurance man have been carefully overlooked.

The graphic arts, it must be admitted, are hardly suited to portrayal of insurance subjects. One can hardly imagine a debit abstracted in egg tempera by Dali, or a cast-in-bronze policy by Rodin, or a Calder mobile of a premium and certainly not a Rivera mural depicting a day in the life of a heroic-sized agent.

Choreographers have passed up insurance too. There is neither a popular dance nor a ballet which has anything to do with insurance—although farmers, cowboys, plumbers and members of nearly every other occupation have been represented in the dantiest of *entrechats* on stages in this country and in Europe.

Finally, no composers of music have drawn their inspiration from the insurance business. This is equally true of the hillbillies, tin pan alleyites and the classicists.

Getting back to literature, it should be noted in passing that only one poet is known to have ever sung of insurance, but even his reference is backhanded and barren not only of beauty but of seriousness too, as will be seen in a moment.

The absence of insurance from literature is underlined by the fact that the word "insurance" is not even indexed in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. "Insured, heavily, 622" does appear in the index of that eminent work, however, and one taking the trouble to look up the reference will find the following lines from W. S. Gilbert's "Etiquette":

"The Ballyshannon foundered off the coast of Cariboo,
And down in fathoms many went the captain and the crew;
Down went the owners—greedy men whom hope of gain allured:
Oh, dry the starting tear, for they were heavily insured."